

THE THEORY OF THE HUMOURS

Humor: The four cardinal humors are blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile, “by the relative proportions of which a person’s physical and mental qualities and disposition were held to be determined.” A balance of humors was thought to maintain good health; an imbalance was thought to result in illness. [*Text in quotations in this guide is from OED.]

Temperament: “[T]he combination of supposed qualities (hot or cold, moist or dry) in a certain proportion, determining the [characteristic] nature of a plant or other body....” A person could be of a sanguine, phlegmatic, choleric, or melancholic temperament.

Sanguine: “Ruddy countenance and a courageous, hopeful, and amorous disposition.”

Phlegmatic: “Not easily excited to feeling or action; lacking enthusiasm; cold, dull, sluggish ...; cool, calm”

Choleric: “Inclined to wrath, irascible, hot-tempered, passionate, fiery....”

Melancholy: Having an excessive amount of black bile: “[I]n early references its prominent symptoms are sullenness and propensity to causeless and violent anger, and in later references mental gloom or sadness.”

Element: fire

Humor: hot and dry

Qualities: choleric (yellow bile)

Complexion: choleric (irascible, passionate, bilious)

Zodiac Signs: Aries, Leo, Sagittarius

Corresponding Planet: Mars (the lesser evil)

Element: earth

Humor: cold and dry

Qualities: melancholy (black bile)

Complexion: melancholic (sullen, dejected, bad-tempered)

Zodiac Signs: Taurus, Virgo, Capricornus

Corresponding Planet: Saturn (the greater evil)

Element: air

Humor: hot and moist

Qualities: blood

Complexion: sanguine (ardent, cheerful, venereal, liberal)

Zodiac Signs: Gemini, Libra, Aquarius

Corresponding Planet: Jupiter (the greater fortune)

Element: water

Humor: cold and moist

Qualities: phlegm

Complexion: phlegmatic (cold, dull, apathetic, cool, calm)

Zodiac Signs: Cancer, Scorpio, Pisces

Corresponding Planet: Venus (the lesser fortune)